



# A Modern Take on the Classic Farmhouse

A custom-built modern farmhouse in the Willamette Valley recalls old-time Americana with a contemporary twist.

WRITTEN BY MEGAN OLIVER  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC STAUDENMAIER

**ABOVE** Architect Christopher Kempel incorporated a wraparound porch with large overhangs into the design. **RIGHT** Looking toward the main wing of the home.



**THE SIMPLE LINES** of classic American farmhouse architecture form a well-proportioned, whitewashed façade that is at once unremarkable and inviting. Symmetrically aligned windows balance the second floor with the ground floor. It is easy to imagine tufts of smoke rising out of a stone chimney. A wraparound porch elicits visions of sitting in a rocker, sipping tea after a long day of work.

To create a modern interpretation of this traditional style in the foothills of the Yamhill Valley, Los Angeles-based firm Rockefeller Partners Architects took these quintessential farmhouse characteristics and married them with natural elements. The result connects the home to its surroundings while pushing the boundaries of what indoor-outdoor living can look like in Oregon.

"In designing a modern farmhouse for a family of five that was relocating from Los Angeles, our goal was to help them feel protected and comfortable, given all the natural elements, while incorporating outdoor living," said architect Christopher Kempel, whose firm also designed a Los Angeles home for the family. "Their L.A. home is very engaged with the exterior and the same goes for the farmhouse,

though it's less apparent. The challenge in Oregon was to provide shade in the summer and protection from elements in the winter. Ideally, you are trying to stay safe, warm and dry."

Kempel said that it's possible to live much more comfortably outside now than you could fifty years ago, so he designed large overhangs for the porches to shelter much of the outdoor living. Heaters hang overhead to temper the winter chill and an open-air fireplace caps the outdoor living space at one end of the home. During the summer, the family can move between the shade of the wraparound porch and the sun-drenched water of the outdoor pool.

"As much as you reasonably can, we incorporated outdoor living," said Kempel. "We wanted the family to feel protected and comfortable given all the normal, natural elements."

## MODERNIZING A CLASSIC

"Because you have that strong symmetry in farmhouses, there is always a back and forth, a push and pull, between what is happening on the inside and the symmetric nature of what is happening outdoors," said Kempel. "Farmhouse design is traditionally not so concerned about what's



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
Exposed timber beams provide a visual delineation between the great room and the open kitchen. A glass hallway with modern, 24" stone tile separates the two wings of the home. Writer's studio with floating fireplace.



happening above the building or to the right of the building, so long as you're creating a balanced and well-proportioned façade. We, on the other hand, wanted to consider the landscape."

In modern architecture, he explained, it is easier to have the exterior of the house be a clear reflection of the interior, often by utilizing picture windows. The challenge was to create a character-rich interior that was functional for the various needs of the family while expressing simple lines outside.

To achieve this goal, the two-story, L-shaped home is divided into two wings. The main wing encompasses the everyday living, working and sleeping areas for the family. It includes four bedrooms, four full baths, two-and-a-

half baths, a gym, a study, a family room, an open kitchen and dining area, plus a library. The secondary wing is dedicated to a three-car garage, laundry room and manager's office. Upstairs guest quarters include two bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths. Beyond the secondary wing is a secluded office nestled against the forest, complete with a half bath and a wet bar.

"The office space was an opportunity for the client to depart from some of the character of the rest of the house," said Kempel. "That room has exposed glass corners, more of a Scandinavian feel with a floating fireplace. It has the same pitched roof line and ceiling treatments as the rest of the home."

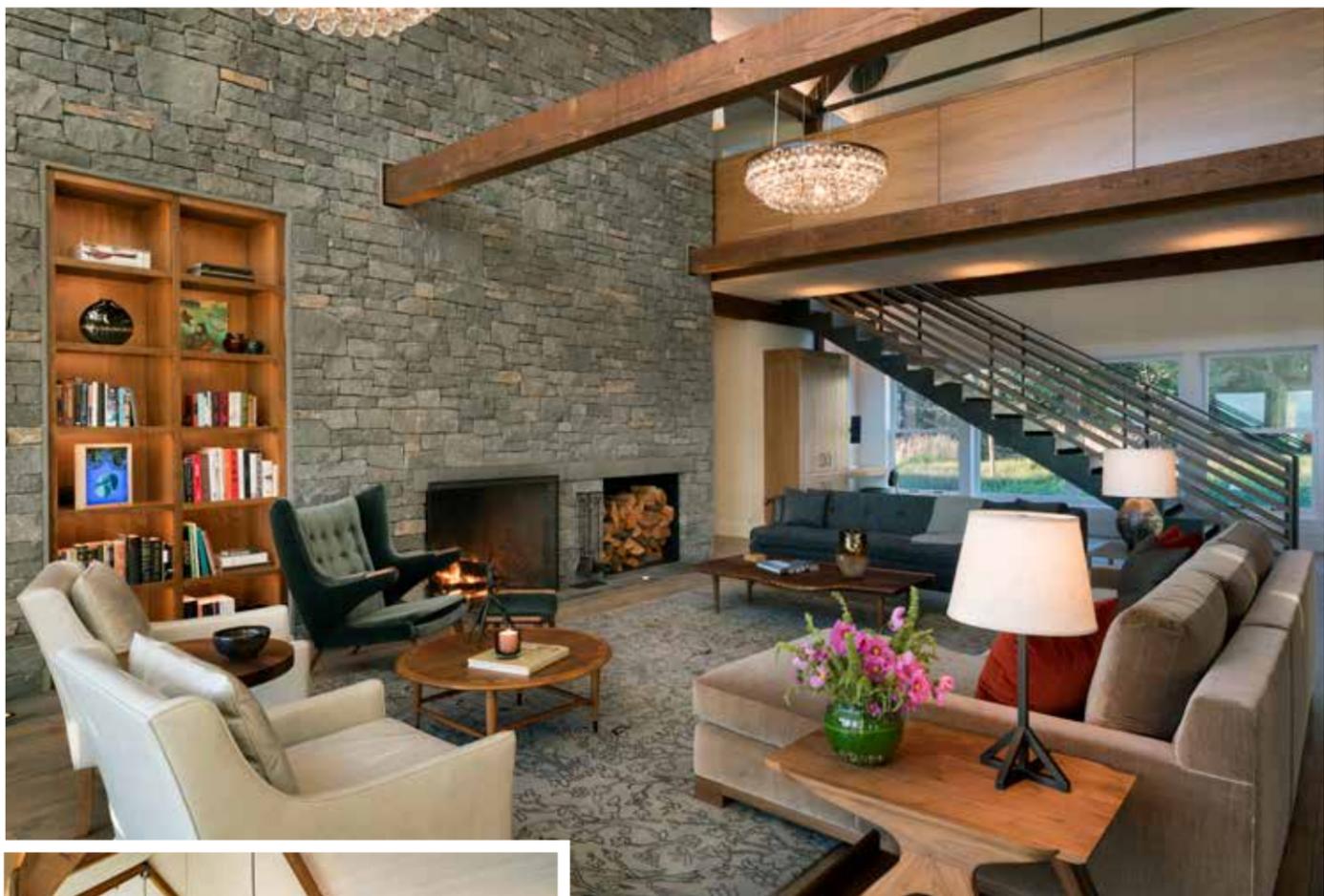
#### **BASKING IN WARM LIGHT**

The front door leads to a luminous glass hallway that separates the two wings. The hallway is intended to feel porch-like, an extension of the exterior. "It provides the experience of being rained on without the realities. The effect on a wet day provides a really neat experience," said Kempel.

Cutting edge glass technology and the availability of energy efficient heating systems made it possible for Kempel to design a more transparent farmhouse, maximizing natural light and lending a contemporary aesthetic while still maintaining classic symmetry across rows of equally sized and spaced windows.

"Possibly counter to what you might think, the use of glass creates a sense of warmth. Even though it is a more traditional house, we tried to make it as light, bright and airy as was reasonably possible," he continued. "High performance glass means that you won't feel drafts as you would have if you incorporated this much glass in a farmhouse fifty years ago."

Portland-based contractor Hammer & Hand used top-of-the-line construction technology to bolster the insulation. Mechanical air changes keep the home feeling fresh. To enhance the warm and cozy atmosphere, radiant floor heat was incorporated throughout the house.



Three basalt masts were constructed from bricks sourced from a Washougal, Washington quarry, servicing five fireplaces, including one in the couples' upstairs master suite. In one of the childrens' bedrooms, a

window seat carved out of another mast created a niche for a full-size bed.

An entire wall of the great room is covered in a chimney mast of ash gray basalt, save for a built-in bookshelf next to the fireplace. This room is where Kempel started to create the story of the house. As it was important to the family to have one "very expressive main room," Kempel designed a lofted ceiling that opens to the kitchen. Locally sourced heavy timber beams with exposed

steel plates give the space more organic texture. "I saw these beams as an opportunity to express a raw, prairie type of approach," said Kempel. "What I mean is that rather than hiding the connections between these timber pieces, we wanted to celebrate them. We put a lot of work and energy into designing the connections, and the heavy steel plates became the inspiration for the language and the feel of the steel on the stairs. It's all interrelated."

Designer Alana Homesley, of Alana Homesley Interior Design in Woodland Hills, California, chose bleached walnut floors to continue the organic feel of the home, a nod to the walnut farms in the area. Light-toned Carrara marble in the bathrooms, whitewashed cedar ceilings, white walls and white kitchen cabinets keep each room bright, providing contemporary contrast to the rustic wood. Homesley, who worked with the home-



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owners on their Los Angeles home, looked for pieces that added levity and balanced one another, incorporating traditional and modern lines. Simpler pieces of furniture in each room play supporting roles to the stars, such as the papa bear chair and the navy blue sofa from BDDW, both in the great room.

"The Mid-century pieces and those from BDDW have such delicate lines that they helped spaces such as the living room appear very light and airy," said Homesley. "The two ochre

chandeliers in the living room also bring in such lightness, sparkle, and drama that counterbalance the heaviness and ruggedness of the architectural beams and structure."

#### JOURNEY TO THE VALLEY

Though the family recently relocated to the area, their roots here run deep. The husband and wife met while attending school in the Willamette Valley, and loved the area. Wanting their children to experience life in Oregon, they decided to

relocate to an eighty-two-acre property that was already in the family.

"They took the opportunity to immerse themselves back in the valley where they had strong family ties in the community," said Kempel, "even though their careers are rooted in Los Angeles, where they still have their other home."

Native grasses grow on the acreage, an aesthetic that the family incorporated into their low-maintenance landscaping. A long driveway winds up a rolling, tree-covered hillside before the white farmhouse appears out of a clearing at the top of a hill, with views of the property and adjacent lumber farms. The current home sits on the site of the original farmhouse, where Kempel stayed while conceptualizing the home.

"I asked the family about their habits, their day-to-day in real terms," he said. "I saw how the sun came across the site and where you could appreciate the views. To really talk about placement and orientation, you need to know where people will spend their time, from sunrise to sunset." ■



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